

Deerfield, IL - U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) brought together mayors representing many communities in the 10th Congressional District to provide a Washington update on key Northern Illinois issues and to solicit their advice on local programs that receive federal funding. Their work session is a bi-annual event in the 10th District.

"As we implement federal programs, our mayors must be key decision makers in our communities," said Congressman Kirk during the meeting held at his Deerfield office. "I am honored to join them to focus on four critical issues: economic development, reducing traffic gridlock, protecting our environment and keeping illegal club drugs out of school."

Kirk opened the meeting with a brief congressional update on national issues including: protecting Lake Michigan from mercury pollution, the new federal train whistle regulation, homeland security funding for police & fire agencies and bipartisan legislation to help doctors against frivolous lawsuits that are driving them from the practice of medicine. The meeting quickly turned to local issues with the primary focus on new initiatives to reduce traffic gridlock.

Reducing Gridlock

"To live in our community is to be stuck in traffic," said Kirk. "I also know to many commuters in the 10th Congressional District, an "Intelligent Transportation System" could sound like an oxymoron. But Congress is considering providing \$500,000 for an Intelligent Transportation System for the Lake-Cook corridor that will alert drivers to problems while providing alternative routes. This will help unclog a key traffic artery in the 10th District.

Kirk reported that Congress already approved funding for the new Libertyville Traffic Control Center. The Center will be the heart of a hi-tech system using fiber-optic cables and cameras to control the major stop lights of Lake County. "The Center will adjust stop lights for weather, time-of-day, seasons and accidents," said Kirk. "It will make our traffic management more efficient - good news for many of us who have been stuck at a traffic light without a car in sight from any direction - relief is coming."

Kirk provided an update on two commuter rail projects that will also reduce traffic. Metra's North Central rail line already serves communities in Wheeling, Buffalo Grove, Mt. Prospect, Prospect Heights, Vernon Hills and Libertyville with four trains a day. Recently the House of Representatives approved \$20 million in additional funding as part of a \$52 million federal transportation package to complete the double-tracking of this rail line and will dramatically

expand service in 2005 to over 16 trains a day.

Congress is also planning to help fund Metra's new STAR Line that will serve communities in Arlington Heights, Rolling Meadows, Mount Prospect and Hoffman Estates. The STAR Line will become the first commuter rail line in northeastern Illinois designed specifically to address suburb-to-suburb commutes.

"Our western suburbs continue to grow at a rapid rate and deserve a commuter rail system that models the North Line," said Kirk. "Building Metra's new STAR Line will relieve traffic congestion in the northwest suburbs and help us meet our obligations under the Clean Air Act by reducing air pollution."

Stopping Noise Pollution

As part of his effort to modify the implementation of a proposed federal regulation that could have overridden local quiet zones by requiring trains to blow their horns at all railroad crossings, Congressman Kirk recently invited Allan Rutter, chief of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), to meet with many of the same mayors joining him for this summit. Kirk updated the mayors on the latest development regarding this federal rule which has been redrafted after protests from many communities defending their quiet zones. Kirk asked each mayor to evaluate the information the FRA used and provide him with arguments to rebut some of the requirements that would be imposed by the draft rule. The deadline for comment on the proposed federal rule was extended to April 19 after Kirk and other members of Congress pressured the FRA.

"I do not believe the FRA's estimate that only \$4 million will be needed to update railroad crossings in the metropolitan Chicago area to comply with the draft rule," said Kirk. "There are estimates that one crossing alone in Northbrook could cost \$250,000 to install new gates. We must modify this Washington rule to prevent noise pollution in Northern Illinois."

Economic Development

Kirk outlined plans for an upcoming summit focused on economic development and job security which will include federal, state and local agencies providing assistance through an all-day session designed to help every 10th District community. He also went on to discuss key economic/environmental priorities including the EPA/Army Corps clean up of Waukegan Harbor.

Next Target: Club Drugs in Schools

Kirk ended with a preview of his upcoming mission to the Dutch Anti-Synthetic Drug Police to increase cooperation between the United States and Netherlands to curb the flow of illegal club-drugs like Ecstasy into our schools. The Netherlands are the source of 95% of the Ecstasy in Chicago's suburbs.